

The Effect of Public Opinion on Climate Policy Performance in the 28 EU Member States



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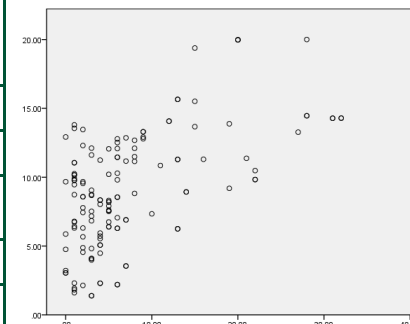
The science behind the causes of climate change were made clear by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report in 2007. The report found that humans were undeniably responsible for the warming of the planet as a result of the burning of fossil fuels (IPCC, 2020). Public concern around climate change has also been increasing significantly since 2013 with a majority of people in the UK, Canada, Germany, Italy, Brazil, France, Poland and the US thinking that climate change will soon pose a dangerous threat to the world (Fagan & Huang, 2019). Politically however, the responses have been lacking with most nations involved in the Paris Agreement, which aims to reduce emissions, missing their current targets (Leahy, 2019). This study aimed to find out how well public concern, among other variables, can explain national climate policy performance.

Using multiple regression analyses, the relationship between public opinion of climate change and climate policy performance was analysed from 2013 to 2017. National GDP, household income levels, national educational attainment levels, and national fossil fuel use were also considered as control variables. Public opinion data was sourced from the “most important problem” question from Eurobarometer surveys, climate policy performance data was sourced from the Climate Change Performance Index and the remaining variables from the Eurostat database.

Variance	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
	.916	.839	.782

Final Regression Model	Standardised Beta	t	Sig.
Opinion	.424	3.554	.001
GDP	.123	3.132	.035
Household	-.210	-2.239	.027
Education	-.211	-.211	.049
Fossil Fuel	-1.057	-1.257	.212

Public Opinion vs CCPI



Multiple regression testing showed that public opinion, GDP and household income levels were all significant predictors of national climate policy performance although public opinion accounted for a much larger standardised Beta coefficient than the other variables. The final regression model also remained robust when including country and year dummy variables.

This study contributed to the scarce research on public opinion and climate policy in the EU but also to the broader scope of public opinion and policy. Future research could study similar predictors over a longer time period and include other controls, such as political ideology, that were absent from this study due to lack of resources. The findings of this study are important as they show that EU states are responsive to public opinion on an issue as existential as climate change.